LOOKING QUEER IN *EL BESO DE PETER PAN* OF TERENCI MOIX

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In his autobiographical volumes, *El cine de los sábados* and *El beso de Peter Pan,* Terenci Moix maintains that Hollywood cinema, and to a lesser degree radio, comics, and film in general, determined his childhood vision of the world and himself and constituted him as «la perfecta imagen del jovencito colonizado» (299) [1]. This cinematic colonization preceded his birth (his mother supposedly went into labor during a screening of *Gaslight),* fixing the parameters of his alienation as a gay youth while simultaneously establishing the context for his eventual act of defiance as an openly gay writer and autobiographer. For the young Moix, however, cinema was not simply an instrument of social control (or «mass culture» as propounded by the Frankfurt School), but rather, as Michael Denning writes with regard to the term «popular culture,» «a contested terrain» (253). During his formative years Moix in fact both passively internalized and, through the prism of his burgeon-

[1] *El cine de los sábados* covers the period of Moix's childhood, whereas *El beso de Peter Pan* focuses on his adolescent years up to the age of twenty-one. The first volume shares its title with a poem by the Spanish poet and autobiographer, Antonio Martínez Sarrión (52). In the second, Moix not only evokes the title of *El beso de la mujer araña,* but like Manuel Puig he uses the image of the kiss to elucidate the relationship of popular cinema to the gay-male spectator. In an introductory note to *El beso de Peter Pan* Moix announces three future installments of his autobiography: *La edad de un sueño «pop,» El misterio del amor* and *Entrada de artistas.* All five will fall under the general title, *El Peso de la Paja,* the name of the plaza in Barcelona where his childhood home was located. Parenthetical references in my text refer to *El beso de Peter Pan.*

ing homoerotic desire, actively refocused the heterosexual (and heterosexist) lens of Hollywood cinema. As Frances Wyers writes of the collaborative efforts of the readers of *El beso de la mujer araña,* he ultimately «retrieves and refashions works made for indoctrination and manipulation» (181). His autobiography thus offers insight into the interconnectedness of popular culture and gay self-representation, positing gay sexuality not as an essence but as a gaze through which the ostensibly natural constructions of heterosexual ideology are denaturalized and rendered queer.

Hollywood Cinema and the Queer Gaze

Gaze-theory, as advanced by film scholars, has for the most part been grounded in gender (as opposed to the power structures of Foucauldian analysis) and articulated through the psychoanalytical paradigms of Freud and Lacan. In the 1975 landmark essay, «Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,» Laura Mulvey set the terms of debate for a whole generation of psychoanalytical film criticism by arguing that Hollywood cinema aims precisely to satisfy the unconscious desire of heterosexual males. Though she allowed for female pleasure through identification with the male perspective, Mulvey remained focused on how cinematic narrative structures the experience of the spectator. More recent film theorists, while often retaining the psychoanalytical framework of Mulvey, have attempted to address lesbian and gay-male spectatorship through a re-examination and reconfiguration of spectator agency. Steven Drukman, for example, delineates a formula for a gay-male gaze whereby «the object of scopophilic pleasure is the man and the subject of ego-identification is ... in constant flux between the woman and the man» (84-85). [2] Whereas such a distinction destabilizes the position of the viewer and loosens the gaze from the gridlock of monolithic gender-identities, the object of desire remains fixed. In contrast to Drukman's «gay-gaze,» a «queer gaze» might be said to subvert the identity not only of spectators but of their objects as well. As Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman suggest, it might even challenge the essentialist idea that «relations of looking are determined by the

[2] The term «gay gaze» first appeared in «When the Gaze Is Gay,» the title of a section of *Film Comment* devoted to the representation of gays and lesbians in Hollywood cinema.

biological sex of the individual/s you choose to fornicate with, more than any other social relations (such as those associated with ethnic or class subjectivities)» (40).

In elucidating his theory of gay inscription, or «homographesis,» Lee Edelman situates the discussion of the gaze and cinematic spectatorship in a historical context, noting the intriguing fact that modern homosexuality, as articulated in late nineteenth-century medical and legal treatises, and the technology capable of making cinema a major cultural force, were both produced at the same moment in the development of industrial capitalism (200). The early discourses of homosexuality, like the patriarchal ideology operative in traditional, mainstream films, sought to affirm heterosexual masculinity as the universal male nature by representing the male homosexual as psychologically and socially deviant. Yet cinema as a medium implicitly questions the naturalness of heterosexual masculinity by reversing «the culturally determined meanings and relations of looking and being looked at» (Edelman 200). Through film, the male body is given as an object to be seen. What is more, masculinity is transformed from a supposed essence into an appearance to the extent that it is performed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark thus write: «The male's seeming exemption from visual representation may work very hard to preserve the cultural fiction that masculinity is not a social construction, but American movies have always served as one of the primary sites through which the culture, in the process of promulgating that fiction, has also exposed its workings as a mythology» (3). As Hark further clarifies, the spectacularization of the male is frequently coded in films as unnatural (152). Cinema nevertheless remains a site where the constructedness of gender identity is made explicit.

The notion of a natural masculinity, that simply is and need not appear in order to be, is destabilized through the act of representation fundamental to all the performing arts. This destabilization is intensified by both a feminization as well as an over-masculinization of the male role. As Lacan contends, «in the human being, virile display itself appears as feminine» (85; qtd. in Edelman 208). Gay and lesbian actors, moreover, frequently leave a mark on the cinematic product (Richard Dyer, «Entertainment» 278); and the masculine posturing of such performers as James Dean in *Giant* is so highly stylized that it becomes a camp parody of masculinity (Dyer, «Rock» 28). Not only is masculine identity performed in

popular cinema, but when posited as an object of desire through the gaze of a gay-male viewer, the subject/object binary of the ostensibly masculine, heterosexual character and feminine, homosexual viewer is inverted. It is through cinema-viewing that homoerotic desire is in fact often articulated. Edelman writes: «the cinema affords the gay male spectator an opportunity to focus on the issue of bodiliness and ways of wearing the body precisely because the image on the screen is disembodied and fragmented. It allows, that is, for the intense scrutiny of the body as such —and from close up— without fear of being seen in the guilty enterprise of looking» (271, note 21). As Judith Mayne urges us to remember, however, this «'safe zone' in which homosexual as well as heterosexual desires can be fantasized and acted out» is not indicative of «an innate capacity to 'read against the grain,' but rather of the way in which desire and pleasure in the cinema may well function to problematize the categories of heterosexual versus homosexual» (97).

According to *El beso de Peter Pan,* the adolescent Ramón [3] experienced concrete, erotic desire while watching performances by Steve Reeves and other male actors. He furthermore attempted to emulate what he perceived to be gay-inclined males in such characters as Carl Trask, played by James Dean in *East of Eden* (141). After seeing this particular film, he openly declared his hatred for his father, whose ritual remark at Sunday dinner, «Preferiría tener un hijo muerto antes que maricón» (142), revealed to him the latent violence of heterosexual patriarchy. [4] Ironically, though not surprisingly, it was through the overtly heterosexist cinema of Hollywood, imposed on Spain by the cultural colonialism of the United States, that he managed to resist indigenous heterosexism. As Dyer points out, several major American actors of the 1950s, including James Dean, Montgomery Clift, and Sal Mineo, were not only «to some degree or other, gay,» but «fit a certain stereotype

[3] Moix was in fact born «Ramón Moix Meseguer,» and uses «Terenci Moix» as a pen name. I will follow his practice of referring to his childhood and adolescent personae as Ramón.

[4] According to Vito Russo, the film *Rebel Without a Cause* depicts a quasi-homosexual in the character played by Sal Mineo (109). Moix found this film less appealing than *East of Eden* because of its violence. He indicates, moreover, that it was withheld for several years from the Spanish screen by censors who feared its deleterious effects on Spanish youth (41). In his case, however, the seemingly more innocent *East of Eden* was to have a far greater impact.

of the gay man —sad, neurotic, confused, ... physically slight, with intense eyes and pretty faces» («Rock» 28); and along with Tony Curtis, Tab Hunter, and Marlon Brando, they formed part of the gay iconography of the period. [5] In one piece of youthful writing Ramón even imagines starring in a film as the son of Rock Hudson in a script written expressly fo the two of them by John Steinbeck. He thereby establishes a symbolic connection with a real gay man through and in spite of his heterosexual representation on the screen. While this might be taken as an affirmation on his part of a transnational and transcultural gay-male identity, what his text demonstrates, as Mayne writes with regard to lesbian and gay spectatorship in general, is «how going to the movies *situates* gay/lesbian desire in specific ways» (166; emphasis added).

Peter Pan Moix: Lost Boy and Fairy

Moix makes much of the fact that crucial events of his life, including the beginning of his mother's labor and his own first sexual encounter, actually took place in movie houses. He maintains that his personal identity (and specifically his sexuality) is inseparable from the images he saw projected on the screen during childhood and adolescence. In analyzing the first volume of memoirs, *El cine de los sábados,* Paul Julian Smith thus writes that for Moix «desire must be projected before it can be felt (and projected on to the widest possible screen)» *(Laws* 48). He further clarifies that to the extent that Moix conceives of the self as fundamentally cinematic, and hence as flat, he avoids the probing of identity and of a tormented sexuality so typical of traditional, gay

[5] Moix discusses at some length the film *Tea and Sympathy.* When he saw it as an adolescent, he viewed the character, Tom, as gay, and identified with him, only to feel betrayed when he was «cured» of his «affliction» through a sexual experience with an older woman (166-67). Vito Russo explains that the film did not explicitly deal with gay sexuality, since given the restrictions of the Production Code in effect at the time, homoeroticism could not be represented and hence did not officially exist. Rather, it portrays Tom as a «sissy,» though as Russo writes, «*Tea and Sympathy...* confirms what the creators and portrayers of sissies have always sought to deny, that the iconography for sissies and for sexual deviates is the same and that the one has come to *mean* the other» (113). Thus, though early Hollywood films were ostensibly silent with regard to gay sexuality, they nevertheless sought to contain and ultimately eliminate it.

[6] Antonio Roig, and Juan Goytisolo at the outset of his autobiographical enterprise, use autobiography as a means of coming to terms with their sexuality

autobiographers. [6] It is Smith's contention that «if the limits of the cinema screen are identical with those of the world (if subjectivity is a purely aesthetic category), then there can remain no ground at all on which to take up an ethical position» *(Laws* 52). In *El beso de Peter Pan,* nevertheless, Moix begins to stake out such a space. He continues to view himself as a product of cinematic culture, yet he specifically re-represents the film narratives of his youth, the most significant of which is *Peter Pan.* In so doing he does not posit an inherent gay identity but contests the ideology of identity on which heterosexual hegemony is founded. *El beso de Peter Pan* is therefore a moral and political gesture. As the opening scene reveals, it is also a fairy tale of gay-male love.

> Cuando Peter Pan me besó en una pérgola de los jardines de Nunca Jamás tuve miedo de que su amor fuese flor de un día y decidí apropiarme de su puñal para obligarle a recurrir a mí en momentos de peligro. Pero el héroe me aseguró que tal preocupación era innecesaria porque nunca nos separaríamos. A guisa de confirmación nos hicimos unos cortes en las muñecas y mezclamos nuestra sangre y por eso conozco que por mis venas corre el polvillo de estrellas que sólo tienen los niños eternos. (29)

In this passage Moix rescripts the conventional Peter Pan narrative. Whereas in most renditions Peter avoids his sexuality, prefering, for example, that Wendy play the part of little mother instead of mistress or wife, in *El beso de Peter Pan* he makes his initial appearance as a lover, and a gay one at that. In keeping with the masculinity of the Walt Disney character, he comes equipped with a weapon of violence. [7] At the outset Ramón is passive —the image of masculinity emerges from the screen and awakens him with a kiss. Yet when this Sleeping Beauty comes to life, he attempts to take control of his situation, going first for the knife — and years later for the autobiographer's pen. What he seeks is not

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and affirming an essential gay identity that has been repressed through an internalized heterosexism.

[7] It seems likely, given the description of Peter Pan in *El beso de Peter Pan,* that Moix first encountered the character in the Disney film. This version of the Peter Pan narrative in fact highlights his masculinity while presenting the female characters in an exaggeratedly sexist light. Tinkerbell, for example, is so jealous of Wendy that she attempts to kill her. The response of the mermaids is similar. Peter, in contrast, is uninterested in the love of women, and his primary passion remains his unexplained rivalry with Captain Hook.

only love but safety from violence. To achieve it, he must appropriate the phallic weapon (and with it the heterosexist apparatus of Hollywood cinema) and convert it into an instrument of male reciprocity. Ramón and Peter consequently engage in an act of blood brotherhood, but rather than blood itself, it is the star dust of the dream factory that constitutes their commonality. [8] This ersatz essence binds Ramón to the dominant culture of Hollywood while instilling in him the illusion that he might fly away like a fairy. In re-representing the Peter Pan movie, Moix thus highlights its intrinsic fakeness, and in the process de-essentializes both his own and Peter's sexuality through a camp performance whose ultimate aim is freedom. [9]

In queering *Peter Pan,* Moix actually seizes on ambiguities already present in the original text. Peter is in fact an androgynous character, usually played by a woman and distinguished by what Jacqueline Rose describes as a «swaggering effeminacy» (xiii). He first appeared in J. M. Barrie's *The Little White Bird,* which according to Rose is charged with the erotic desire of a man for a little boy. Subsequent theatrical and cinematic productions of the Peter Pan narrative have endeavored «to wipe out the residual signs of the disturbance out of which it was produced» (Rose 5). [10] Yet an

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[8] In *Las virtudes del pájaro solitario* Goytisolo inverts the ideology of «tainted blood» (as articulated in both the anti-Semitic and anti-AIDS contexts) in an effort to affirm the identity of various marginalized groups, including Spanish Jews and Muslims, persons with AIDS, and, through the popular conflation of homosexuality and AIDS, gay men in general. Moix, in contrast, uses the image of blood as star dust in order to render identity imaginary. He and Peter become «blood brothers,» but ultimately only through a game. (For a discussion of «blood brotherhood» as it relates to gay sexuality in Christian European history, see John Boswell.) Moix's conception of identity is thus radically opposed to that of gay essentialism and the ethnic model of gay sexuality delineated by Steven Epstein in his analysis of the essentialist/constructionist debate.

[9] Though Ramón occasionally engages in «camp behavior» by explicitly imitating the feminine, he is more apt to adopt a «camp-eye» (Moe Meyer 13) or a «camp attitude» (Dyer, *The Matter of Images* 42) vis-à-vis the dominant culture. Dyer elucidates the concept of «camp attitude»: «there is a difference between camp behaviour and camp attitude. The latter implies an ironic stance towards official or mainstream images or representations. Camp in this sense is profoundly denaturalizing. Far from expressing a sense of what is natural, it constantly draws attention to the artifices attendant on the construction of images of what is natural» (42). Nonetheless, as Leo Bersani observes, this «appropriation of hegemonic norms partly subverts them *and* partly reidealizes them» (51; emphasis added).

[10] As Rose clarifies, the concept of origins is particularly problematical in the case of Peter Pan. Though the character first appeared in *The Little White Bird,* a

«unsettling of gender identities» (xiii) remains, and in a 1991 version staged at London's Drill Hall, Peter is played as a lesbian in disguise (ix), and the famous call for audience participation —«clap your hands if you believe in fairies»— is cast in an explicitly queer context (xiii). Moix's reading of Peter draws specifically on the paradox of «a little boy who flies away because he does not want to grow up» (Rose 26), that is, a child who must abandon the protective sphere of the childhood nursery (and in the process steal other children) in order to remain an eternal child. As a youth, Ramón himself inhabits a hostile world («preferiría tener un hijo muerto antes que maricón»), and his escape involves an effort not only to retain his childhood identity but to forge a refuge from an alien adult society. The space for this refuge is provided by Hollywood, but unlike the Never Land of Disney and of most previous adaptations of *Peter Pan,* his enchanted isle of lost boys and fairies is imagined as a distinctively homoerotic utopia.

As Dyer maintains, the Hollywood construction of utopia is clearly a problematical enterprise, since «to draw attention to the gap between what is and what could be, is, ideologically speaking, playing with fire» («Entertainment» 279). Although most mainstream Hollywood productions try to work through the contradictions raised by utopian representations «in such a way as to 'manage' them, to make them seem to disappear[,] [t]hey don't always succeed» (279). This is clearly the case with Never Land. Through the use of temporal negation, Never Land is posited as a place without time. [11] It is dehistoricized, like the mythical child of the adult imagination, or for that matter, gay and lesbian culture in general under patriarchy. For Ramón, however, it is also the realm of a boy unlike any other boy, who excites his homoerotic desire while holding forth the promise of an idyllic space in which love

theatrical version of his adventures was produced twenty-four years before Barrie actually wrote the play. What is considered the children's classic thus depends on a number of writers, and according to Rose the subsequent reworkings of the text are as significant as the ostensible source.

[11] The name of this utopia is in fact ambiguous. In Spanish, Nunca Jamás suggests a place that once existed but that has forever ceased to be, that is, the land of «nevermore.» In English three designations are used: Never Land, Never Never Land, and Never Never Never Land. The first and the third signify timelessness. The second, through the use of the double negation, indicates a time that has always existed (never never = ever) but that is unactualized. This is in fact how Moix envisions Never Land when he evokes its queer contradictions.

between men is possible. For this reason his «Nunca Jamás» is not a static and timeless entity but a means through which sexuality is produced and queer praxis temporalized.

Notwithstanding, Ramón's first real sexual encounter, which occurs in the Cine Cervantes of Barcelona during a screening of the film version of *Aida* with Sophia Loren, is altogether different from the imaginary affair with Peter Pan depicted at the outset of *El beso de Peter Pan.* As the scene of jealousy between Aida and Amneris unfolds, Ramón feels a hand unzip his pants and begin to masturbate him. He continues to sit passively with his eyes riveted to the screen, and in the moment of climax witnesses a subliminal penetration as the victorious soldiers of Radamés, having returned from the Nubian campaign, make their triumphal entry into the city of Memphis. From his adult perspective, the cacophony of emotions experienced in the moment («placer,» «necesidad urgente de llorar,» «voluntad de echar a correr, de liberarme y al mismo tiempo de sucumbir» [100]), are overshadowed and enveloped by the absurd artificiality of the film: «No podía pedirse mayor acumulación de falsedades: Sofía Loren embetunada para parecer princesa etíope y expresando sus cuitas con la voz prestada de la Tebaldi, mientras la Simionato cedía la suya a Lois Maxwell, disfrazada de hija de los faraones sin anunciar que, con los años, acabaría haciendo de permanente secretaria de James Bond» (101). The young Ramón nevertheless sees himself diametrically opposed to the stars of *Aida.* Whereas they appear endowed with glamorous bodies and grand passions, he is an awkward and unattractive adolescent being fondled by a middle-aged man. His drama, moreover, takes place in silence and darkness, and though he might turn to face the figure at his side, he remains transfixed by the overarching narrative of *Aida.* As autobiographer Moix exposes both the unnaturalness of the film as well as the incongruity of the events on the screen and in the darkened rows of a cinema called Cervantes: «más adelante encontraré divertido contar que la primera vez que me metieron mano fue en un cine con nombre de escritor manco» (101). In re-reading the episode he hence conflates both «low» (popular cinematic) and «high» (operatic and, by implication, Cervantine) culture. [12] More important, he makes the public space

[12] The culture of Moix's youth was limited primarily to popular cinema, movie magazines, and comic books. As a sort of autodidact (when he was thirteen his parents decided that he should attend a trade school rather than pursue an

of cultural representation (the movie house as opposed to the private sphere of the «closet») the locus of the expression of a marginalized sexuality. As an adolescent, Ramón attempts to escape the homoeroticism of the Cine Cervantes by running out the door of the theater. Eventually, however, he achieves a veritable «coming-out» when he learns to perform his sexuality as a «counter-act» to the dominant representations he observes.

Although Ramón initially flees the world of gay sexuality, several gay males play a decisive role in his adolescent development. The most influential of these is Roberto. [13] As competing members of an acting school, they first see each other as rivals, but a friendship develops when they accidentally meet at a screening of *Ben-Hur*. While in the Cine Cervantes Ramón remained alienated from his sexual partner, he and Roberto manage to dissociate themselves from the discourse of the film and establish a complicity as gay viewers. Roberto initiates the operation through ironic comments and gestures. Ramón responds with uncontrollable laughter: «A mi lado, Roberto tenía el rostro exacto de la inocencia. Su fingida gravedad acentuaba mi diversión mientras la altisonante música de Miklos Rosza proclamaba que nos hallábamos ante un momento sublime de la historia de la humanidad. Acababa de nacer el Mesías. Lástima que yo no paraba de reír» (338). In this way Ramón mocks the aesthetics of the film as well as the values that it professes. He laughs at the representation of the Nativity, thereby rejecting the official religion of his culture and expressing delight at the «advent» of Roberto in his life and the «birth» of their

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academic degree in preparation for the university), he eventually acquired «high» literary and cinematic tastes. It is through his reading of «low culture,» however, that he expresses his greatest creativity. This, according to the analysis of John Fiske, might be explained at least in part by the very shallowness of «low culture» texts: «Conventionality and superficiality not only keep production costs down, they also open the text up to productive reading strategies» (109). A «high culture» text, in contrast, often requires readers to decipher rather than generate meanings, and can even work «to exclude those who have not the cultural competence [the undereducated Ramón] (or the motivation) to decode it on its own terms» (109).

[13] In addition to Roberto, Moix sees his uncle Cornelio (a pseudonym surely attributed to him by Ramón on account of his resemblance to the actor Cornel Wilde) and his lover Alberto as positive gay figures. Of his childhood friends, the so-called Niño Rico was significant insofar as he was the first to ascribe to Ramón the label of «maricón» when the latter tentatively expressed his affection for him. The word fell on Ramón like a curse and a mark of shame, and it is with irony and bitterness that Moix describes in *El cine de los sábados* his surprise upon discovering years later that El Niño Rico was himself actually gay.

friendship. Through an act of play, he and Roberto thus achieve a temporary space of their own within the domain of the movie house and in opposition to the representation on the screen. [14]

At the conclusion of *Ben-Hur*, as Roberto and Ramón leave the cinema, Roberto begins to question the ostensible heterosexuality of the characters, Ben-Hur and Messala, and argues that the two are actually bound by a homoerotic passion. Ramón is caught off guard by his argument and insists that the meaning of their relationship is to be found in the conflict between Jewish nationalism and Roman imperialism. Yet according to Roberto, they are lovers: «Por eso le da a Mesala esa rabieta. ... A nadie le da una rabieta tan gorda por cosas del nacionalismo ese. Tiene que haber una pasión» (340). He further contends that essential scenes of love between Ben-Hur and Messala have been cut and that as it stands, the film makes no sense. [15] In reading the film in this way, Roberto not only indulges in a homoerotic fantasy but reveals an intuition of how hetero —and homo— sexualities are interconnected and how an affirmation of the former is predicated on and even requires an implicit affirmation of the latter. [16]

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[14] Elsewhere, Moix insists: «YO NO HABÍA TENIDO INFANCIA» *(El Peso de la Paja* 305). Nevertheless, in this and other moments with Roberto he reveals the spontaneity and exhilaration of a child, engaging in a playful behavior that is not an apprenticeship for adulthood but an affirmation of freedom and an act of rebellion. His conception of play is in fact suggestive of Nietzsche's «fröhliche Wissenschaft» and of Sartre's rejection of the «spirit of seriousness.»

[15] Gore Vidal and William Wyler had a surprisingly similar conversation regarding *Ben-Hur.* Vidal recalls: «I proposed the notion that the two had been adolescent lovers and now Messala has returned from Rome wanting to revive the love affair but Ben-Hur does not. He has read Leviticus and knows an abomination when he sees one. I told Wyler, 'This is what's going on *underneath* the scene — they *seem* to be talking about politics, but Messala is really trying to rekindle a love affair'» (qtd. in Russo 76). Though Vidal contextualizes the scene in terms of Ben-Hur's reading of the Bible, both he and Roberto, despite significant cultural differences, detect the same gay subtext. This is perhaps merely a coincidence. It is also possible that Moix intentionally reconstructed the dialogue between Vidal and Wyler in his effort to weave Hollywood film and lore into *El beso de Peter Pan* and thereby represent himself and his relationships with others as derivative of Hollywood culture. Indeed, his entire life is a reproduction of others' scripts.

[16] As Diana Fuss observes, «one of the fundamental insights of Lacanian psychoanalysis, influenced by a whole tradition of semiotic thought, is the notion that any identity is founded relationally» (2). And if, as Robert Young has implied, heterosexual identity cannot even be thought «except as differing from the different» (88), then homosexuality can be said to haunt mainstream Hollywood cinema whenever heterosexual masculinity is made explicit, as in the case of *Ben-Hur.*

Ramón and Roberto become inseparable friends, and Roberto eventually suggests that they imitate the relationship of Messala and Ben-Hur as he has interpreted it. Although Ramón is cognizant of his own homoerotic desire, he tries at this point to assert a heterosexual identity, and when Roberto announces that he will willingly adopt a feminine role in order to comply with Ramón's feigned machismo, the latter ascribes to him the negative stereotype of «las mariconas más detestadas» (380). Ironically, whereas Roberto strives to rescript the heterosexist cinema of Hollywood and in so doing create a positive gay relationship, Ramón unwittingly plays the part of censor, restraining his homoerotic desire and rigorously enforcing the literal interpretation of the cinematic fictions that dominated his early years. Soon afterwards, he admits to himself his desire for Roberto, but before he can win him back, Roberto takes a different lover. As a consequence, Ramón experiences a nervous collapse. His mother sends him to a psychiatrist, who treats him with disgust and contempt, as well as to a series of faith healers, all of whom fail to «cure» him of his homosexuality or relieve him of his psychological and physical malaise. Only gradually does he recover from the loss of Roberto as a lover (the two actually remain friends for years, until the latter's recent death from AIDS), realizing that his unhappiness resulted not from sexual orientation but from his inability to rescript his life in accordance with Roberto's queer reading of the movies.

As autobiographer, Moix in fact comes to blame Peter Pan for Ramón's failed relationship with Roberto (412). Though Peter continues to elicit Ramón's homoerotic desire, in the final analysis he holds him captive, charming him with seductive images but obstructing reciprocity with real boys his age —«los niños que Peter Pan ató a la butaca de un cine de barrio para que se les llenasen los ojos con imágenes destinadas a no abandonarles jamás» (416). Peter haunts Ramón's every fantasy, appearing in the guises of lover, friend, and even progenitor, and in the end subsuming the entire second-hand repertoire of popular imagery that Ramón recycles in order to reproduce himself. In nightly rituals of masturbation, he conjures forth images of Peter, whose kiss leaves on his lips a wound «que sólo otros labios más maduros podrían cerrar» (390). As a result, his homoerotic desire short-circuits, and all that remains is the debris of Hollywood. In a particularly graphic passage Moix depicts his childhood persona as «el último abor-

to de las brujas que, en un aquelarre insensato, jodieron con Peter Pan» (303). The agent here is of course Ramón himself in the vortex of his fantasies. What is significant is that in each of his avatars, Peter Pan continues to reveal a homoeroticism representative of Ramón's sexuality. Moix finally suggests that Ramón and Peter are one and the same («acaso [su] beso fuese el mío propio» [390]), and as imaginary gay clones Ramón carries the blood of Peter Pan not only in his veins but «hasta el fondo de su ano» (454). Ultimately, however, «Peter Pan Moix» disappears when the young adult fully expresses his sexuality. For this reason the child eludes the mature life-writer as the impossible other of all autobiographical praxis.

Si(gh)ting Never Land

In the «Epílogo en Nunca Jamás» that follows the narration of adolescence, Moix orchestrates a complex scenario in which the adult autobiographer (Terenci) confronts the figures of Peter Pan, Ramón, and the alter ego that he has attempted to forge throughout his writing career. This latter persona, El Niño del Invierno, first appears in the prologue to *El beso de Peter Pan,* as Terenci visits the site in Paris (the second floor of a book shop inhabited by expatriate youth) where his final transition from childhood to adulthood occurred in what he describes as «aquel glorioso año de 1963» (474). El Niño del Invierno is identified with winter to the extent that the youthful Moix sought to escape the fullness of life through his cultivation of the imaginary. Yet he is not the Ramón of the past, but a product of the writer's imagination, and along with Terenci, a fictional representation of the writing-self. Whereas El Niño del Invierno is implicitly present whenever Moix reflects on the past, Ramón remains inaccessible, not only because he has ceased to exist, but because his existence was ultimately articulated through a fantasy that the adult can no longer sustain.

Moix writes that one day while in Paris, Ramón attends a screening of the film *All About Eve* (which he describes as «el apasionamiento de los cinéfilos y el delirio de las mariquitas adeptas al culto de Bette» [471-72]), and as he is leaving the cinema of Chaillot, whom should he encounter but El Niño Eterno, Peter Pan. The two initiate an animated discussion of the movie. Peter criti-

cizes its aesthetics, and Ramón wonders if he has turned Marxist: «Sólo le faltaría que se arrancara con un discurso sobre Brecht o Piscator. Pero no eran aquéllas sus intenciones. Por el contrario, estaba en onda de seductor» (472). Ramón agrees to his overtures, if only to convince him that Mankiewicz is a great director. (As with Roberto, a homoerotic relationship is constructed in reference to a mainstream Hollywood film). When they reach the book shop where he sleeps, Ramón shows Peter an old edition of the work of J. M. Barrie, whom Peter labels «puritano» for having failed to tell the truth about his relationship with Captain Hook and the displeasure the latter felt when Peter chose to escape to Shangri-la with Kim of India. His was in fact a tale of homoerotic love, as Roberto knew to be the case with *Ben-Hur*. Before Peter and Ramón ascend to the upstairs room, the fairy tale is thus revealed as such. [17]

When they reach the next floor, however, an unexpected visitor awaits them: El Niño del Invierno. In a sense this is the moment when the narrative of the past is completed and childhood ends. Peter informs Ramón that El Niño del Invierno is not yet born, since some ten years will elapse before Moix begins to create him through his writing. Then Terenci himself enters, and he and Ramón gaze into each other's eyes. Again it is Peter who clarifies for Ramón the identity of the new visitor: «Ese tío eres tú» (475). Ramón is saddened by the vision of what he will become, and rather than merge with his image, he refuses the implicit narcissism of the adult autobiographer and pleads with Peter to take him away. Suddenly, «Peter Pan levantaba el vuelo, con el joven Ramón aferrado a sus muslos» (475), and the two fly off over the rooftops of Paris, carrying with them the entire cast of actors and characters that populated Moix's youth, including Michael Strogoff, the Little Lord, the body of Steve Reeves, and the face of Lillian Gish. Afterwards, Terenci remains alone with El Niño del Invierno, pondering the past that he has managed to evoke throughout his writing but whose freshness and insolence («el descaro primordial que fue el verdadero origen de la vida» [476]) he has failed to recover.

[17] This magical space is suggestive of the rooms of both Melquíades in *Cien años de soledad* and Carmen Martín Gaite in *El cuarto de atrás*, insofar as it is posited as the site wherein the text is generated. It also evokes the room in the pawn broker's shop in *Fanny and Alexander* where the young Ingmar Bergman discovers his own alter ego and the source of his creative genius.

Moix's closing comments function as a gloss to the epilogue but leave unresolved the ambiguity of his quadripartite self-representation, which ultimately finds meaning in the spatial configuration of the scenario. Two interior spaces are posited —the cinema and the book shop. These are the physical sites wherein culture is represented and where Ramón performs the primary activities (watching and reading) out of which his childhood self is constituted. Ramón is made by what he sees and reads, but through it (and specifically through the image of Peter Pan) he also attempts to make himself. The inevitable conflict (between Ramón and Peter and in the final analysis between Ramón and himself as both a passive and active agent of identity) is temporarily suspended when a third space is delineated in the intermediate zone separating the cinema from the book shop. In the opening sentence of the epilogue, Moix writes: «Ramón Moix Meseguer descubrió su juventud en uno de esos *quais* de París» (463). This discovery occurs neither within the movie house nor the book shop but outside, on the streets of the city and at the edge of the river. To accomplish it, Ramón must first «come-out» of the cinema and assume his sexuality. (On previous occasions such a move involved a flight from his sexuality, as in the Cine Cervantes episode and even with Roberto.) As he and Peter make their way through the open space of the city, they themselves begin to project their image —«continuaron conversando por las viejas calles, reflejándose en los charcos de la lluvia reciente» (473). Through the repetition of their steps, moreover, they actually stretch space out («paseando, paseando» [473]), increasing their distance from the cinema and the book shop and momentarily transforming their marginal social position into a point of centrality. When they arrive at the quai beneath the book shop, Peter «quiso detenerse junto al Sena para contemplar el reflejo de Nôtre Dame en sus aguas cabrilleantes» (473), but in response, «Ramón le dijo que la iglesia se veía mucho mejor desde el sofá situado junto a la ventana» (473). Through this decisive statement, Ramón «picks-up» Peter Pan, and whereas as a result the child will presently be «picked-up» and carried away forever, Ramón clearly becomes the agent of seduction of the companion at his side. He then takes him, via the book shelves of the first floor, to the sofa in a corner of the upstairs room, which he claims as his «absoluta propiedad» (473). In reaching this goal a long trajectory is completed, not only from the cinema of Chaillot through the streets of

Paris, but from that more distant movie house in Barcelona where his mother's labor first began, across the years of childhood and adolescence. Now it is he who waves his wand over Never Land, breathing new life into the lost boys and fairies of the enchanted isle. Perhaps in this moment he «makes love» for the first time to a real man, dispelling the child and his imaginary lover and living once and for all the youth he was denied and that he denied himself. [18] Perhaps he fancies himself free at last from the idols of the imagination and capable of forging his own destiny in the world. In either case, however, he remains bound to the text —whether as Ramón, el Niño del Invierno, Terenci, or Peter Pan himself, and the seeming rupture that occurs in the epilogue between child and adult, text and life, and cinema and self (in spatial terms the opening of an intermediate zone as the locus of freedom) is itself a fiction. As Moix has earlier admitted, he is not the author of his life, and in opposition to the realist illusion, he declares: «en literatura, como en la vida, el protagonista nace, pero no se hace» (294).

Despite the dream of freedom, the autobiographical persona in all his incarnations remains overdetermined by the discourse of film. At one point death appears as the reel through which the kaleidoscopic imagery of life will eventually be darkened and consumed. But death is also articulated through movie scripts. In meditating on the passing of family and friends Moix evokes the quintessential representation of the Grim Reaper («empuñando la guadaña y el reloj de arena» [444]) from the final scene of Bergman's *Seventh Seal,* envisioning himself as a latter-day Blanche DuBois in the age of AIDS, dependent for solace on «la amabilidad de [sus] cadáveres» (439). Even AIDS is a means of enacting a previously scripted identity, and in recalling the death of Jaime Gil de Biedma, Moix goes so far as to transform the disease into a final gesture of camp performance: «Se iría al otro mundo reteniendo como letanía última la inmortal proclama: "He necesitado muchos hombres en mi vida para llamarme Shanghai Lili"» (439). He thus continues to transcribe the cinematic texts through which his world has been mediated. He does not create images (as Rose has demonstrated in the case of Peter Pan, it is unlikely that any individual actually does) but instead casts his gaze on the ready-made im-

[18] It should be noted that Ramón had several sexual experiences during adolescence, but like the encounter in the Cine Cervantes, none involved love.

ages of his cultural milieu. In so doing he refocuses them, constituting himself not as the hero (Peter Pan Moix after all disappears before the end of the performance) but as a lens through which the imaginary is reorganized and re-represented. *El beso de Peter Pan* is therefore bound to its culture, but, like little Ramón dangling from the legs of Peter Pan, the text deflects its course, revealing an alternate perspective on the world and in the process rendering the image of Moix's own experience as a gay adolescent in post-war, Francoist Spain.

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